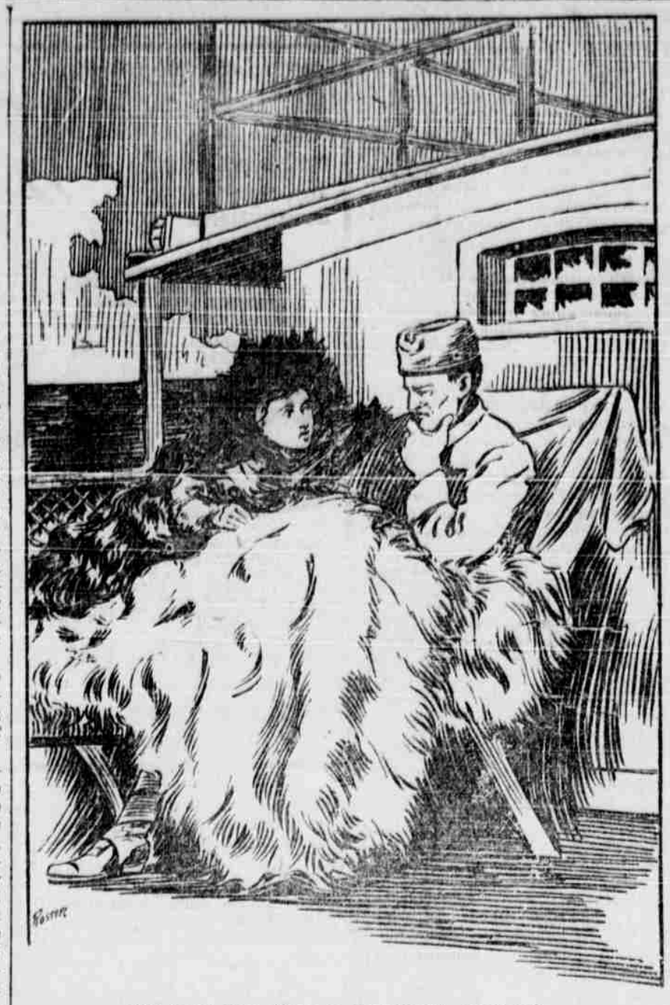
The SKY-MAN

HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHAS. W. ROSSER



"At Least You Have a Magnificent Revenge."

SYNOPSIS.

Philip Cayley, accused of a crime of which he is not guilty, resigns from the army in disgrace and his affection for his friend, Lieut. Perry Hunter, turns to hatred. Cayley seeks solitude, where he perfects a flying machine. While soaring over the Arctic regions, he picks up a curiously shaped stick he had seen in the assassin's hand. Mounting again, he discovers a yacht anchored in the bay. Descending near the steamer, he meets a girl on an ice floe. He learns that the girl's name is Jeanne Fielding and that the yacht has come north to seek signs of her father, Captain Fielding, an arctic explorer.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

Cayley could not contradict her, and he saw there was little need of trying to do so. She had spoken simply, and very gravely, but it was evident the years had not taken the sting out of her grief.

"He told you where he was?" he asked.

"Oh, quite exactly," she told him; "he gave us latitude and longitude, and mapped the coast-line. So you were wrong, you see, in what you said about cartographers. And he gave us the route by which with reasonable fortune, we might find open water. We had good fortune and we got here safely, but, of course, we were too late. The hut on the shore there is deserted. We have seen no signs of life at all. The men have gone ashore to search, and there is to be a gun-fire if they find anyone alive. But they have been out all day and there has been no sound. You will understand, I think, though, why I did not want to sleep tonight in my cabin in the yacht; why the ice and the dome of stars seemed better."

"Yes," he said, "I understand." Presently, after a moment's musing, he added, "What seems strange to me, incomprehensible altogether, is, that men like your father, and so many others, should risk and lose their lives trying to reach the pole."

"You can't understand that—" she questioned surprised, "you, a man with wings?"

"I suppose it's because of the wings," he answered her. "I slept there once, early this summer—slept, and rested, and ate a meal."

"There—" she echoed incredulously. "Where do you mean?"

"At the pole, or within a half degree of it—I won't guarantee my instruments, nor my hit-and-miss observations any more accurately than that—and it seemed a poor place to risk one's life trying to reach. Just the ice-pack—the eternal ice-pack; nothing but that." Then his eyes lighted a little. "But I should like to go there some time, in the winter—should like to fly straight ahead, for hours and hours, through the long dark, until I could see the North Star squarely above my head in the zenith, the center of all the universe. That would be a sight worth having, I should think. Some day, perhaps, I shall try for it. And then one could go straight on across—a week or ten days would do it all—from Dawson City, say, to St. Petersburg."

"Dawson City to St. Petersburg!" she repeated; "only a creature of wings could put those two cities in the same sentence, even in imagination. And even with you it must be imaginary. You couldn't do it, really—could you?"

"Yes," he said; "I could do it."

"You're tireless, then?" she asked. "You would go on flying, flying, without rest, for a week?"

"I don't fly," he told her, "or hardly at all. The birds don't fly, not these great sea birds that live on the wing. They sail; so do I."

"But, then, don't you have to go with the wind?"

"You've sailed a boat, haven't you?" he asked by way of answer. "You put up a sail to catch the breeze, and then you make it force your boat right up into it; make your boat go against the wind, by the force of the wind itself. That was regarded as a miracle once when men first did it."

"Of course," she admitted, "but you do that by tacking."

"That's the way I do it—by tacking, and the force of gravity is my heel."

"How long have you lived like this?" she asked abruptly.

"Really lived? Only three months or so. I spent the better part of five years learning to fly."

"And you have flown all over the world?"

"All over this most deserted patch of it."

There was another silence. Then she said: "And what a contempt you must have for us—for us, poor wingless creatures, who cannot cross a little fissure in a rock or a bit of open water without such toilsome labor. Yes, that must be the feeling—contempt; it could hardly be pity."

"If that's true," he rejoined quickly, "it's only poetic justice. I've only achieved toward the world the feeling which the world held for me."

The words were spoken harshly, abruptly, as if his memory had just tasted something intolerably bitter. The manner of the words, no less than the sense of them startled her, and she checked a movement to turn and look into his face. Instead, she tried to recall it as it had looked when she had first stood confronting him, before the twilight had faded.

It was a strange face, as she remembered it, but this, she reflected, was probably due to the incongruous effect of his deeply tanned skin with his very light sun-bleached hair. A sensitive face, finely chiseled, almost beautiful—and young, but with an inexplicable stamp of premature age upon it. It had not struck her at all as a tragic face. And yet the meaning of those last words of his, uttered as they were, had been tragic enough.

"At least you have a magnificent revenge," was all she said. And then there was another silence. She herself was trying to think of something to say, for she realized that his confession had been involuntary, and that the silence must be distressing him.

But it was he himself who broke the silence with a natural, matter-of-fact question. "You say a searching party has set out from the yacht? Have they been long ashore?"

"They set out only a little after sunrise. We came into the bay with the last of yesterday's twilight, and the sight of those huts, at the edge of the shore—" her voice faltered a little, nearly made us hope that the impossible might prove true. We fired our signal cannon two or three times and then sent up some rockets, without getting any answer. It was too late to go ashore in the dark; so we had to wait a few hours for another sunrise. The few of us who were left on the yacht expected them back today before dark fell. But I suppose there's nothing to worry about in their not coming. They went equipped to pass a night ashore, if necessary. You don't advise me to begin worrying about them, do you?"

He did not answer her question. He was recalling something which his amazing meeting with the girl out here on the ice-floe had, for a little while, put quite out of his mind—the weird, silent tragedy he had seen enacted a few hours before upon the glacier behind the headland. The victim, the man in the leather coat, must have been one of the party from the yacht; but it was impossible that the little band of his murderers could be. No one freshly landed from the yacht would have been dressed as they were, or would have been armed with darts.

With no better look at them than had been possible to him as he hung above their heads, he had been convinced that they were white; certainly, the leather-coated man had been talking to them, freely enough, in English. And yet, if white, they must have been refugees—survivors, if not of Captain Fielding's ill-fated expedition, then of some other, tragic, unreported ship wreck.

But if they were white men—refugees, why had they fled from their hut at sight of the yacht which came bringing a rescue? Why had they driven that one luckless member of the rescuing party who fell in with them, into that carefully prepared ambush, and then murdered him, silently? Even Eskimos would not have done a thing like that.

His long silence had alarmed the girl, and presently, perceiving that this was so, he drew himself up with an affected start. "I beg your pardon. I drifted off, thinking of something else. Living in the sky doesn't seem conducive to good manners. No, I don't believe there is anything to worry about. Any way, as soon as light comes back, which won't be long now, I can set at rest any fears you may have. I'll go and find your party, and I'll search the land, too—for anything else that may be there. And then I'll bring you word."

"You are very good," she said with a little hesitation, "but I can't let you—"

He interrupted her with a laugh. "It's nothing difficult that I am proposing to do for you, you know."

"That's true. I had forgotten your wings. The rocks, the ice, the steep places, that mean so tragically much to them, are nothing at all to you. But what are you doing now? Even you can't find them in the dark."

He had already begun unstrapping the bundle he had made of his wings, and seemed to be preparing for immediate flight. That was what caused her question.

"No," he said; "I shall wait for sunrise."

"But why not here, on the yacht? We can give you a comfortable bed there; better, certainly, than that sleeping bag of yours."

"I am afraid," he said, "that what you call a comfortable bed in a yacht's cabin would be the surest instrument that could be found for keeping me awake all night. No, I shall find a sheltered hollow up at the top of that headland yonder, where I shall sleep deeply enough, you may be sure."

She watched him, silently, while he slipped the steel-jointed rods into place, drew the catgut bow strings taut, until they sang—until the fabric of his planes shimmed in the starlight—quivered, as if they were instinct with a life of their own.

A sense of the unreality of it all came welling up strongly within her, and a touch of an almost forgotten fear of him.

"Good night," she said, holding out her hand—"goodby."

"Till morning," he answered.

A little breeze came blowing across the ice just then. He dropped her hand quickly, slipped his arms into their places in the frame, mounted the ledge of ice, and then, with a short run, sprang forward into the breeze.

She saw his planes bend a little, undulate, rather, with a sort of sculling motion, as he flew forward, not far above the level of her head. He dipped down again as soon as he had open water beneath him, and almost skimmed the surface of it. Then, gathering speed, he began mounting.

She felt curiously alone now that he was gone; and a little frightened, like a child just waking out of a dream. And she blew a small silver whistle that hung about her neck, for a signal to the men on the yacht to send a boat for her.

Then, while she waited, she dropped down rather limply on her pile of bear-skins. Her hand found something hard that had not been there before, and taking it up she found that it was a curious blunt stick of wood, rudely whittled, and about ten inches long. It must have fallen from his belt while he sat there talking to her. She wondered what he used it for.

CHAPTER III.

The Murderers.

Two men clad in bear-skins were shuffling rapidly along across the glacier. Dawn was already flooding the arctic sky with its amazing riot of color—rose, green-gold, violet, and the ice beneath their feet was rose color with misty blue shadows in it.

The foremost of the two wayfarers was a man of gigantic stature, six and a half feet tall and of enormous girth of chest; yet, somehow, despite his size and the ungainly clothes he wore, he contrived to preserve an air almost of lightness; of lean, compact athleticism, certainly. A stranger, meeting him anywhere and contemplating his formidable proportions, and then looking up past his great, blunt jaw into his cold, light blue, choleric eyes, would be likely to shiver a little and then get out of his way as soon as possible.

He was walking steadily, glancing neither to the right nor the left. Even over the treacherous, summer-glazed surface of the glacier, his great stride carried him along at a pace which his companion found it difficult to keep up with. Besides, this companion made his task the harder by allowing his eyes to wander from the track they were following, and casting little furtive, anxious glances at the man beside him. In any other company he would have been a rather striking figure himself, well above middle height, powerfully made, and with a face that had lines of experience and determination engraved in it. But the comparison dwarfed him.

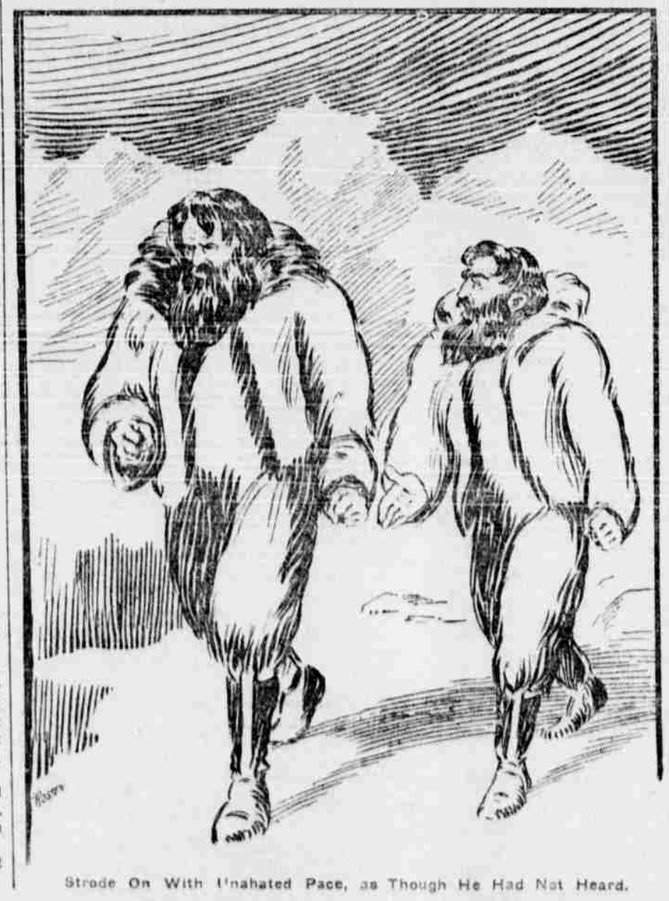
He seemed to be trying to make up his mind to speak, and still to find this a difficult thing to do.

At last, with a deprecatory cough, he began:

"What I can't see is, Roscoe, what you did it for. It was all right to do it if you were figuring out any gain from it. We'll all agree to that. Anything for our common good, that's our motto. But where's the gain in killing just one poor fellow out of a party of 30? He seemed a good kind of chap, too, and friendly spoken. We didn't serve you like that, when you come aboard the Walrus at Cape Nome."

"It would have cost you four men to do it, Planck, and you were short-handed as it was."

"That wasn't why we didn't do it. You was a stranger, and you was in a bad way. There was a mob of men that wanted you mighty bad, and we gave you shelter and carried you off and made you a regular sharin' member of the crew. Of course if we'd had any reason to act contrary, we'd have done so. And that's why it seemed to us—to me, I would say, that you probably had some reason in this case, here. And, well—we'd like to know what it is."



Strode On With Unabated Pace, as Though He Had Not Heard.

But the man he had addressed as "Roscoe" strode on with unabated pace, as if he had not heard. For any attention he paid to his questioner he might have been alone in that expanse of ice and sky.

Planck accepted the silent rebuff as if it had been only what he had expected, but he sighed regretfully. He had once known, and it was only four years ago, that same swaggering trick of contemptuous authority himself. He had been master, the most tyrannical sort of master, some say, to be found anywhere in the world; the captain of an American whaler. And this very man, at whose heels he was scrambling along over the ice, had been one of his crew; had never approached the quarter-deck where he reigned supreme, without an apologetic hand at his forelock, and had always passed to the leeward side of him up on the deck.

But the Walrus had been destined never to see port again. She lingered too long on the whaling grounds to get back through Behring strait that fall; and failed in the attempt to make McKenzie bay, where other whalers in similar plight put in for the winter. Instead of this friendly harbor, she was caught in the pack and carried, relentlessly, north and westward. The milling pressure of great masses of ice crushed in her stout hull, so that the open water they had been hoping for, became, at once, their deadliest peril. The moment the ice broke away, she would go to the bottom like a plummet.

But still the slow, irresistible drift of the ice-pack carried them north and west into a latitude and longitude which, so far as they knew, no human travelers had ever crossed before. And then in the depth of the arctic night, bereft of hope, and half mutinous, they found a land that never had been charted, and, most marvelous of all, a human welcome. For here on the shore were Captain Fielding and the two other survivors of his ill-fated expedition.

The fate of the explorer's ship had been, it seemed, precisely that of the Walrus. She had been caught in the pack, crushed in it and carried against this coast. Before the coming of spring, and with it the breaking of the ice, Fielding and his men had been able to carry their stores ashore, and of these, the greater part still remained.

Of the Walrus people, in all, there were 11, and these, with the three original castaways, settled down to the prospect of an indefinite number of years upon that nameless coast. "We can live like Christians," Captain Fielding had said, "and we can always hope."

His superior knowledge of arctic conditions made him, rather than Captain Planck, naturally commander of the little company. He established the regimen of their life, doled out the store from day to day, and, as best he could, through that long winter night, provided entertainment for the forlorn little group. He told them of his explorations on the coast, of the lay of the land, of what they might hope to see when the sun should come back to them, marking the beginning of another long arctic day.

Among other things, quite casually he told them of a ledge in the hills, across the glacier, which contained, he believed, the most extraordinary deposit of gold in the world. So incredibly rich was it, that the rock itself had almost been replaced by solid metal. The Alaska gold, he said, was only the sweepings, in his opinion, of this immense store.

At the sound of the word "gold," the eyes of the man named Roscoe had brightened for the first time since they had taken him, shivering from his long immersion in the cold water, aboard the Walrus. He drew into the circle that sat about the reading lamp, and began asking questions. Gold was something he knew about. He had mined it in Australia, in California, and in the Klondike. He questioned Captain Fielding about the exact whereabouts of the ledge, about the sort of ore it occurred in, and about the best means of cutting it out.

To some extent his own excitement infected the others. Even Captain Planck, whose only well-understood form of wealth was whale blubber, began to take an interest in Roscoe's questions and in the explorer's answers to them.

It was a strange and rather pathetic sort of excitement, Captain Fielding thought. To them, in their practically hopeless plight, gold was about the least useful thing they could find; not hard enough to tip lances or arrows with, too heavy and too easily melted for domestic purposes. However, it gave them something to think about, and he, without a suspicion of the sinister direction in which these thoughts might turn, went on and told them all he knew.

When, after a period of tantalizing twilight, the sun again came fairly over the horizon, they besought their commander, with a savage sort of eagerness from which he might have augured ill, that he take them at once to the ledge. They had caught sight of it from a distance, even as Cayley had done, hung in the air above the valley, and had run recklessly on ahead of their leader. When he came up to them, he found them dangerously excited, the man Roscoe fairly dazed and drunken with it.

Finally Fielding had left them to their own devices, and came away with his two companions. And until the light of that short day had begun to fail, they—the Walrus people—stayed, gloating over this strangely useless treasure.

For three days after that the man Roscoe never spoke a word. On the fourth day, when the little party assembled for their mid-day meal, the 11 men of the Walrus were the only ones to answer the summons. Captain Fielding and his two companions had disappeared.

Captain Planck could not recall that meal now without shuddering, for there at the foot of the table, opposite to him, had sat the man Roscoe, with murder written plain in every line of his face. He had looked a beast, rather than a man, that day. The sated blood lust in his eyes made them positively terrifying, so that the others shrank away from him. He had seemed not to notice it at least not to take offense at it. He was in hilarious spirits for the first time since they had known him; seemed really to try to be a good companion.

Captain Planck abdicated his leadership that day. He was perfectly conscious of the fact. He had known that to retain the leadership he must take that murderer out and execute him. He knew that if he did not do this, the murderer, not he, would hereafter command the party, and that unless he himself yielded the promptest obedience of any, he would follow the luckless trio whom they were never to see again.

From that day to this there had been no more murders. Roscoe had ruled them with a decision and a truculence which put anything like insubordination out of the question. He had been obeyed better than Captain Planck ever had been. He had worked them fiercely all those four years, cutting, everlastingly, at that wonderful, exhaustless golden ledge, beating the friable ore out of it with heavy mauls, then, laboriously, conveying the great rude slabs of pure metal on rough sledges over the perpetual ice of the glacier to a cave near the shore, where they had deposited it. There were literally tons of it hidden there when the smoke from the yacht's funnel was first seen on the horizon.

The moment the news of the approaching steamer was reported to Roscoe, he had entered upon what seemed to his followers a thoroughly irrational and inexplicable line of action. He had ordered them, first, to remove all signs of recent habitation from the hut to the cave where their gold was concealed; then, to cover the cave mouth with a heap of boulders, to secure it against discovery.

Long before the strongest glass on the ship could have made out their moving figures, he took the whole party back to the hills in hiding. He had kept them from answering the hails and the gun-fire from the yacht by the sheer weight of his authority, without vouchsafing a word of explanation.

The next day they had seen the searching party come ashore, and with their knowledge of the lay of the land found it perfectly easy to evade observation, though nothing but the strong habit of obedience kept them from courting it.

Then, along in the afternoon, had happened what seemed to them the strangest thing of all. They had seen a solitary straggler from the searching party coming along across the ice. He could not see them. It would have been perfectly easy to evade him, but Roscoe now ordered them to go down to him and tell him who they were, and to offer to escort him along the trail down the glacier. And at a certain point they were to lag behind and let him go on alone. That was all any of them knew of their leader's plans, till they saw the flying dart and the smudge of crimson on the snow.

Now, at last, came Planck to the leader, asking the reason why. But his mission, as it appeared, had not prospered.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Progressive Farming.

"Well, yes," confessed Honest Farmer Hornbeak, the while a grim grin wrinkled his weather-beaten complexion. "It's a good 'eal o' trouble, but the satisfaction I feel amply repays me for the extry work. Ye see, by degrees I'm sharpenin' up the top of every stump on the place, and in the course o' time I hope to have matters so arranged that the hired man will find it fully as comfortable to stand up durin' the day as to set down."—Puck.

WILL LOOK TO CANADA FOR WHEAT

ONE REASON WHY AMERICANS GO TO CANADA.

In the Chicago Inter-Ocean of a few days since reference was made to the fact that in 1909 the United States raised 737,189,000 bushels of wheat, and last year grew only 695,443,000, a decrease of 41,746,000 bushels. The article went on to say: "True we raised last year more than enough wheat for our own needs, but it is apparent that if production continues to decrease in that ratio we will soon be obliged to look to other countries for wheat to supply our rapidly increasing population."

The purpose of the article was to show that reciprocity was to be desired. This is a question that I do not propose to deal with, preferring to leave it to others who have made a greater study of that economic question than I have. The point to be considered is, with the high price of lands in the United States, and with the much lower priced lands of Canada, and their ability to produce probably more abundantly, is it not well for the United States farmer to take advantage of the opportunity Canada affords with its lower-priced lands and take a part in supplying the needs of the United States, which it is quite apparent must come sooner or later? It is probable there are now about 300,000 American farmers in Western Canada, cultivating large farms, and becoming rich, in the growing of 25- and 30-bushel-to-the-acre-wheat, in producing large yields of oats and barley, and in raising horses and cattle cheaply on the wild prairie grasses that are there, both succulent and abundant. All these find a ready market at good prices. Amongst the Americans who have made their homes in Canada are to be found colonies of Scandinavians, and all are doing well. I have before me a letter from an American Scandinavian, now a Canadian, an extract from which is interesting. Writing from Turtle Lake, Saskatchewan, he says:

"I came up here from Fergus Falls, Minn., October 24th, 1910, and thought I would let you know how i have been getting along. We had a very mild winter up to New Year's, but since then it has been quite cold and lots of snow, but not worse than that we could be out every day working, even though we had 65 below zero a few times, but we do not feel the cold here the same as we did in Minnesota, as it is very still and the air is high and dry. This is a splendid place for cattle raising and mixed farming. There is some willow brush and small poplars on part of the land, which is rolling and covered with splendid grass in the summer. Not far from here there is timber for building material. There are only 8 Norwegians here, 6 Scotchmen, 2 Germans. The lake is 20 miles long and full of very fine fish.

"There is a lot of land yet that has not been taken and room for many settlers, and we wish you would send some settlers up here, as there are fine prospects for them, especially for those who have a little money to start with. Send them here to Turtle Lake, and we will show them the land, if they have secured plats, showing the vacant lands, at the Dominion Lands office in Battleford. Send us up some good Scandinavians this spring."

The Canadian government agents will try to meet his wishes.

Solely to Blame.

Diner—Who is that singing so dreadfully out of tune?

Restaurant Proprietor—It is my wife.

Diner — Perhaps the accompanist plays out of tune?

R. P.—She is accompanying herself! London Opinion.

The Ignorance of Casey.

Casey—Phwat kind av a horse is a cob?

Mulligan—It's wan thot's been raised intoirely on corn, ye ignoramus.

He who gives pleasure meets with it; kindness is the bond of friendship and the book of love.—Basile.

Some women are like some old hens—set in their ways.

First Year in College

"Freshie" Is Often Made Butt of a Jest Because of His Freshness.

On the campus, the athletic field and the streets of the college town, and in the dormitory, the lecture room and the chapter house, the members of the freshman class are pre-eminently conspicuous in the weeks of early fall. There are many thousands of them in all parts of the land, and to each of them it is an important, not to say an epoch-making period in their lives. A time of test and trial it is, too, filled with novel experiences, which are rarely harrowing in the undergoing, but which always become highly harrowing when told in later years.

The freshman in college—like the senior of last June, who has now become a freshman again in the great university of life—has much to learn, and not a little to unlearn. Golden opportunities are his; serious responsibilities, which he occasionally magnifies, but more often does not realize; and precious privileges, such as the old graduate would give his all to possess once more.

The freshman is often made the butt of a jest because of his freshness. But even as we smile at him we feel deep in our hearts that his freshness is a treasure above all price. The discipline at the hands of upper classmen, the varied experiences of undergraduate life and the work in classroom and laboratory, which gradually change him from a freshman to a senior, also rob him of something which it is a great pity to lose.

Perhaps some day a college will succeed in turning out seniors who are still freshmen. It is an ideal well worth the attention of the educational world. It is well to learn the great essential truths and to have at command the lore of the ages, but the happiest man and the man most useful in the world is he whose education has not been at the cost of the characteristics and the qualities, the outlook and the impulses which distinguished him as a freshman.—Youth's Companion.

The Bill of Rights.

The Bill of Rights in English history is the declaration made by the Lords and Commons to the Prince and Princess of Orange on February 13, 1689, in an act setting forth "the rights and liberties of the subject, and settling the succession of the crown." This bill is virtually the beginning of free government in England. Never since it passed the parliament has British king dared to interfere with the fundamental rights of the British people. The Bill of Rights, while not original—the most of its principles being a repetition of those laid down in Magna Charta—is justly looked upon as the foundation of English freedom.